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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000351

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OSD/ISA FOR ALLEN/POWERS

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TAGS: PREL PREF PINR PTER PGOV TH BURMA GPOI DPRK

SUBJECT: BGEN ALLEN'S MEETING WITH NSC SECRETARY GENERAL

WINAI

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES ALEX A. ARVIZU FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) In his meeting with visiting OSD/ISA Principal Director for Asian and Pacific Affairs BGen John Allen, Thai National Security Council Secretary General Winai Phattiyakul outlined the RTG's strategic threat outlook, Thailand and ASEAN's frustration with the surprise move of the Burmese capital, RTG thinking on refugees, and recent RTG progress in reducing violence in the South. Winai responded to Gen. Allen's briefing on recent USG efforts to improve military relations with China, saying, "that is really a relief for us smaller countries in the region." End Summary.

STRATEGIC THREAT PICTURE

¶2. (C) On January 16, visiting Department of Defense OSD/ISA Principal Director for Asian and Pacific Affairs Brigadier General John R. Allen, accompanied by the DCM, met with Thai National Security Council Secretary General Winai Phattiyakul. Following BGen Allen's briefing on an upcoming Royal Thai Armed Forces trip to the Joint Forces Command in March, Winai explained that, in dealing with the Thai military, it was useful to understand Thai political leaders' strategic threat framework. Terrorism remains the primary threat, followed by transnational crime and low-intensity conflict (LIC). LIC "is what we have to deal with in the next century," whether participating in UN or ally-led peace keeping operations, or dealing with a host of other security concerns in Southeast Asia. For example, Thailand has not settled its borders with its neighbors, and this may yet lead to tension. Moreover, the nature of Thailand's neighbors--poorer and less politically stable--could challenge Thailand's security as well. In order to meet these challenges, the Thai military must restructure its forces into a "smaller, smarter, more mobile" model.

BURMA

¶3. (C) When asked about the Burmese government's recent surprise decision to relocate their capital, Winai confirmed that the RTG had been surprised by the move as well. This opaque decision on the part of the junta in Rangoon had caused consternation within the recent ASEAN leaders meeting in Kuala Lumpur. Winai explained that the military leadership in Rangoon had four possible reasons for the move: fear of a U.S. military strike on the capital (though Winai noted that the move doesn't mean much given U.S. military capabilities), a desire for increased control over the country from a more central location, superstition (the generals give much consideration to astrology and numerology) and, finally, a desire by senior General Than Shwe to develop his hometown, where the new capital will be located. According to Winai, the Burmese leadership may use the upcoming Armed Forces Day in March to show the new capital to some foreign Ambassadors and Defense Attaches.

BURMESE, NORTH KOREAN AND HMONG REFUGEES

¶4. (C) Winai denied that the move of the Burmese capital has resulted in increased numbers of Burmese refugees on the Thai border. The population in the border camps remains stable. Good RTG-USG-UNHCR cooperation aside, Winai remains saddened by the reality of life for these refugees. The younger generations have never lived outside of the camps. "These people have no future." According to Winai, the RTG is considering expanded educational assistance to these refugees, with the hope that, in 20-30 years, these refugees can serve as a key group in a newly revitalized Burma.

¶5. (C) Winai expressed frustration with the host of other refugee issues that Thailand faces. The RTG is "not happy" with the trickle of North Korean refugees that cross over from Laos and RTG provincial officials have been instructed to find and arrest them. Hmong refugees from Laos are even bigger problem, with at least 5,000 having crossed over into Petchaboon province in the last year, apparently hoping that a new U.S. resettlement program would be in the offing. According to Winai, the RTG may have to repatriate them

little-by-little to send the message that Thailand cannot take them. "We hope that our friends will understand when we have to take strong action."

SOUTH

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16. (C) Winai expressed appreciation for USG understanding that the Thai South is a domestic issue. The situation there is "a little better." Incidents of violence were down in December--only 30 in that month compared to an average of about 150 in October and November. Part of this downturn may be due to the serious flooding in the area, however. According to Winai, the RTG is increasingly successful in its efforts to understand the separatist movement, arrest the right people and disrupt the violence. Local citizens are providing much more information to authorities, which has led to the arrest of several bomb makers and "commandos." Some people are "happy to be arrested," because it allows them to cease working for the separatist cause without fear of reprisal from the insurgents.

17. (C) Based on the success of civil affairs programs and this shift in local thinking, the RTG is considering drafting a special "plea-bargaining" law that would provide increased incentives to those people who turn themselves in. Though short of an actual amnesty program, Winai suggested that the latter may be under consideration as well. When asked why the local population was cooperating with the government now, Winai explained that more and more southerners are starting to understand that the violence was not improving their lives. On a side note, Winai commented that cooperation with Malaysia continues to improve, in part because Malay officials now understand that the flight of 131 Thai Muslims to Malaysia last year was not a legitimate refugee issue, but a plot concocted by separatist leaders to generate attention to the situation in the South.

GPOI, CHINA

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18. (C) Gen Allen briefed Winai on the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative (GPOI) and USG efforts to improve relations with China, including our expanded defense relations which, in the short term will emphasize military education. Winai expressed strong interest in this issue saying "that is really a relief for us smaller countries in the region."

19. (U) BGen Allen has cleared this message.

ARVIZU